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# The Assist<sup>TM</sup>

*Helping Students Access and Make Progress in the General Curriculum*

August 2005

Volume 5, No. 1

## MI-Access Ready for Fall 2005

Dear Readers,

Welcome back! Hopefully the summer has reinvigorated you for another challenging school year.

Over the past three months, the Office of Educational Assessment and Accountability (OEAA) has accomplished numerous tasks in preparation for the fall administration of MEAP and MI-Access—the first fall administration since the 1990's. For example, in early summer, the MI-Access, BETA, and Pearson staff led a successful range-finding meeting for the Expressing Ideas component of the Winter 2005 Functional Independence Pilot ELA assessment. Look for information in the next issue of *The Assist* on who participated in the effort and how the results will affect scoring and assessment development in the future.

In addition, the OEAA convened Functional Independence Content Advisory Committees (CACs) and a Sensitivity Review Committee (SRC) to review every item administered during the Functional Independence pilot for difficulty, appropriateness, and potential bias. The article on page 3 provides a detailed description of the specific activities the committees undertook. We would like to thank all the

Michigan educators who participated in the review process for their focused and detailed work.

This summer we also found out that Michigan's application to use the *interim* 2 percent flexibility for making 2005 AYP calculations was approved by the U.S. Education Department (USED). This is an important step in recognizing the various student populations that are being measured by high stakes testing, and in acknowledging that schools and districts should not be penalized for appropriately using alternate assessments. The article on page 5 contains further information on this critical topic.

The Guidelines for Participation in State Assessment Team also achieved one of its major goals this summer—completing the *Assessment Accommodations Summary Table*. The table was approved by the State Board of Education on June 14, and lists which accommodations are standard or nonstandard for the MEAS, as well as those accommodations that are permitted or not permitted for the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and eventually the Michigan Merit Exam (MME). More

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## NOTES FROM THE CONTRACTOR TO MI-ACCESS COORDINATORS

Welcome to the new school year. As you know, the assessment window for grades 3-8 is September 28 through November 8, 2005. You will receive your materials in up to four shipments, beginning the week of September 12th.

Following is a description of the materials you will receive in each shipment. Keep in mind that (1) a more detailed cover letter will be included with each shipment explaining the specific materials enclosed and what to do with them; (2) organizational tools will be added—such as packing slips, distribution sheets, and serial number lists—to help with inventorying and distribution; and (3) the quantities in all shipments will be based on the student and teacher counts entered by the district into the MI-Access Online System.

### First Shipment

The first shipment will include both district materials and boxes of assessment booklets organized by school. The district materials will include (1) a *District Coordinator Sample Packet* with one copy of each standard print assessment booklet being used in the district; (2) a

*Return of Materials Packet* with UPS return labels, a divider sheet, a packing checklist, and paper strips; (3) large and small MI-Access calendars; (4) *Fall 2005 MI-Access Security Compliance Forms*; and (5) *Fall 2005 MI-Access Coordinator and Assessment Administrator Manuals* (for grades 3-8).

The school boxes will contain Fall 2005 Participation, Supported Independence, and Functional Independence (English Language Arts and Mathematics) standard print assessment booklets, and acetate rulers when applicable.

Please note that all assessment booklets (including those enclosed in the *District Coordinator Sample Packet*) are barcoded for security and must be returned along with the other assessment materials.

### Second Shipment

The second shipment will contain *District, School, and Teacher Identification Sheets*, student scan documents, and *Teacher Return Envelopes*. The

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## MI-Access Ready for Fall 2005

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information about the table and the revised state guidelines can be found on page 4.

While we accomplished a great deal this summer, fall will be even more of a challenge. Please be sure to read "Notes from the Contractor to MI-Access Coordinators" above as it includes important fall dates, information regarding the delivery of assessment materials to districts, and instructions on how to account for students

who move into districts after the window in which their student demographic information could be entered in the MI-Access Online System.

Also keep in mind that *only* grade 3-8 MI-Access assessments will be administered this fall; the grade 11 MI-Access assessments are scheduled for administration next spring. We have included a table on page 7, which provides the exact dates for the two different MI-Access assessment windows.

Again, welcome back. We look forward to working with you to make this another successful year!

Sincerely,

Peggy Dutcher  
Coordinator, Assessment for  
Students with Disabilities Program  
[dutcherp@mi.gov](mailto:dutcherp@mi.gov)

## NOTES FROM THE CONTRACTOR

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materials in this shipment will be organized by school, and a *School Distribution/Inventory Sheet* will be enclosed to explain how to distribute them.

The student scan documents in this shipment will be preprinted for students for whom the district completed the full Pre-ID process by the original deadline. Blank student scan documents will be provided for those students for whom the Pre-ID process was only partially completed. (More detailed information on pre-identification and the various deadlines is included in each shipment cover letter and in the manual.)

### Third Shipment

The third shipment will contain accommodated versions of the Functional Independence (English Language Arts and Mathematics) assessments based on the enlarged print, Braille, audio cassette, and/or CD version counts submitted by the district in the MI-Access Online System. Braille/Large Print rulers will also be included when applicable.

### Fourth Shipment

The fourth shipment will include Pre-ID student barcode labels printed by the contractor for students for whom the full Pre-ID process was completed by the second deadline. Districts may use them on the blank student scan documents provided in the second shipment, or place them on top of preprinted student scan documents for students who no longer attend their originally designated schools. Districts also have the option of printing their own labels for students for whom the Pre-ID process was not completed in the OEAA Secure System by September 19th (the final deadline).

If you have questions, please call the Toll-free MI-Access Hotline at 1-888-382-4246 or send an e-mail message to [mi-access@tasa.com](mailto:mi-access@tasa.com).

## MI-Access SRC and CAC Meetings a Success!

In late June 2005, teams of Michigan educators from across the state came together to participate in the MI-Access Functional Independence sensitivity and content review process. To start, facilitators and educators were trained by Alison Peterson and Mike Beck, from Beck Evaluation and Testing Associates (BETA), on (1) the process to use for reviewing the assessment items, and (2) how to appropriately utilize data generated from the Winter 2005 Functional Independence pilot assessments to inform the process. Then, members of the Sensitivity Review Committee (SRC) and the Content Advisory Committees (CACs) used the process and data to review every Functional Independence assessment item for difficulty, appropriateness, and potential bias.

Following the meetings, Office of Educational Assessment and Accountability (OEAA) and BETA staff reviewed the recommendations of the

committees, which included suggestions for further refining the Functional Independence mathematics item specifications, guidance on developing future items to more thoroughly assess the extended Grade Level Content Expectations and extended benchmarks, and ideas for improving item coding. Feedback from staff and participants was highly positive, and many committee members indicated interest in continued involvement with the MI-Access assessment development process.

Anyone interested in participating in future SRC or CAC meetings should complete and submit the nomination form available at [www.mi.gov/mi-access](http://www.mi.gov/mi-access). The review process is an excellent way to become involved in the development of Michigan's alternate assessments, and to help OEAA staff ensure that the quality and appropriateness of its assessment instruments are sufficient to lead to enhanced instruction and curriculum for a wide range of students with disabilities.

## Fall OEAA Conferences Fast Approaching

Be sure to sign up for the Fall OEAA conferences being held around the state. To register, go to the MI-Access Web page at [www.mi.gov/mi-access](http://www.mi.gov/mi-access), scroll down to "Conferences," and look for the registration link. The conferences will be held during October and November (see the chart

below for specific dates and locations). Keep in mind that the first day of the two-day conferences will be dedicated primarily to MEAP, ELPA, and accountability issues, and the second day will focus predominantly on issues related to state assessment of students with disabilities (MEAP, MI-Access, and ELPA).

2005 Dates	Locations
October 26 & 27	Marquette
October 27 & 28	Gaylord
November 1 & 2	Livonia
November 7 & 8	Sterling Heights
November 9 & 10	Grand Rapids
November 14 & 15	Lansing

## Update on the Guidelines for Participation in State Assessment

On June 14, 2005, the Office of Educational Assessment and Accountability (OEAA) presented the *Assessment Accommodations Summary Table* to the State Board of Education for approval. The table outlines accommodations for all students—including those with disabilities and English Language Learners—and indicates whether the accommodations are standard or nonstandard for current components of the Michigan Educational Assessment System (MEAS). The table also includes accommodations that are permitted or are not permitted for the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), and allocates space for similar information to be included for the Michigan Merit Examination (MME) once that assessment is implemented.

The development of the table is important for two reasons. First, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requires states to develop guidelines for participation in state assessments. Michigan presently has draft guidelines designed to inform people about the participation of students with disabilities, but that document is now being expanded to cover *all* students.

Second, knowing which assessment accommodations are standard or nonstandard is important because the use of nonstandard accommodations results in scores that do not count towards Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) or NCLB participation calculations, and makes students ineligible for the Michigan Merit Award.

The table was prepared by the Guidelines for Participation in State Assessment Team, which is comprised of over seventy-five teachers, administrators, university faculty, an SBE member, and MDE staff. The table was approved by the Board and will appear in the accommodations chapter of the final guidelines.

The team continued to meet over the summer to update and revise other chapters of the guidelines. The most recent version, including a new table of contents, is available on the MI-Access Web page ([www.mi.gov/mi-access](http://www.mi.gov/mi-access)) and at the MI-Access Information Center ([www.mi-access.info](http://www.mi-access.info)).

## New Assessments for MI-Access

Due in part to ever-evolving federal regulations regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities in accountability and high stakes testing, Michigan must continue to refine its existing assessments and develop new ones. For example, to comply with the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, the state is now in the process of developing new instruments for students taking Participation and Supported Independence to assess them more specifically in the content areas of English language arts (ELA) and mathematics. New science assessments will also be developed for Participation, Supported Independence, and Functional Independence.

In July 2005, Assessment Plan Writing Teams (APWT) were convened to begin the refining and development process. The teams started by extending the ELA and mathematics Grade Level Content Expectations (for grades K-8) and benchmarks (for high school). The Extended Grade Level Content Expectations and benchmarks will form the basis for items that will be used on the newly developed Participation and Supported Independence assessments. The teams also began extending the benchmarks for science to apply to Participation, Supported Independence, and Functional Independence.

Many of the participants from the Content Advisory Committee (CAC) that worked on the original Participation and Supported Independence assessments as well as those who participated in a meeting that took place in June to review the Functional Independence pilot items returned as members of the APWT.

Look for updates on the progress of the APWT in future issues of *The Assist*.

## **U.S. Education Department Allows Additional Flexibility for Students Taking Alternate Assessments**

This fall, the U.S. Education Department (USED) will issue regulations allowing a different population of students taking alternate assessments to have their proficient scores counted for NCLB purposes. In the past, only 1 percent of the total population enrolled in a district at a given grade level was able to have proficient alternate assessment scores counted. These have typically been the scores of students with the most significant cognitive impairments. Research has indicated, however, that there is another class of students that comprise an additional 2 percent of the total tested population, who will not be able to meet grade-level curriculum expectations, even with the best instruction. Therefore, the USED has determined that it is appropriate for these students to be assessed through alternate means and have their proficient scores counted.

Until the new regulations are implemented, states were permitted to apply for interim 2 percent flexibility and, if approved, use it in making their 2005 AYP calculations. Last spring, Michigan submitted its application for the interim 2 percent cap and received federal approval this summer. Subsequently, Dr. Jeremy Hughes, Deputy Superintendent/ Chief

Academic Officer, issued a memorandum to LEA and ISD Superintendents and Public School Academy (PSAs) Authorizers and Directors explaining the situation.

The memorandum outlined federal procedures applicable to the separate 1 percent and 2 percent caps, which operate under very different sets of federal criteria. It also indicated that local districts need only apply for exceptions to the 1 percent cap (which itself applies only to students taking the MI-Access Participation and Supported Independence assessments.) Decisions about eligibility for the interim 2 percent flexibility cap were made at the state level using criteria developed by the MDE. If a thorough review of data indicated that a building's or district's scores were suppressed by the performance of the "in-between" population of students, an adjustment was made to the school's AYP calculation in time for the August release of the 2005 School Report Cards.

To read the full Hughes memorandum, go to the MI-Access Web page ([www.mi.gov/mi-access](http://www.mi.gov/mi-access)), scroll down to "Resources," and click on "Application for Exception to the 1% Cap on Students Proficient Using Alternate Standards."

## **HELP WANTED!**

### **Nominations for Standard-Setting Panels**

This December, standard-setting panels will be convened and charged with the task of recommending cut scores for the performance categories of Surpassed, Attained, and Emerging toward the Performance Standard. Special and general education teachers as well as administrators are invited to participate in this important process. Parents and members of the business community are welcome too.

Panelists will learn how MI-Access assessments are scored, how proficiency is determined, how the MI-Access assessments are aligned with the state's Extended Grade Level Content Expectations (EGLCEs), and about potential changes in the content of future assessments. In addition, each panelist will be trained on how to apply the standard-setting method that will be used to make recommendations on cut scores for the performance standards.

To be eligible for participation, panel members must be able to attend both days of a two-day session. Interested parties should complete the nomination/application form posted on the MI-Access Web page ([www.mi.gov/mi-access](http://www.mi.gov/mi-access)) and at the MI-Access Information Center ([www.mi-access.info](http://www.mi-access.info)).

# Using *The Assist* in Special Education Team Professional Development

*Each year the April edition of The Assist has been dedicated to helping Individualized Education Program (IEP) Teams determine the appropriate state assessment for students with disabilities. There are several important factors that affect this decision, including the determination of (1) the appropriate assessment for a student given his or her grade or level of disability, (2) appropriate assessment accommodations, and (3) how such decisions impact NCLB calculations. To further facilitate IEP Team decision-making throughout the year—not just in April—the following article provides a few recommendations about how The Assist and other resources available through the Office of Educational Assessment and Accountability (OEAA) can be used to support district professional development activities.*

Many districts plan their staff professional development (PD) calendars early in the school year. Before all the available dates have been filled by the many relevant topics facing educators, special education administrators and teachers need to consider advocating for a PD session dedicated to state assessment for students with disabilities. The many issues surrounding this topic evolve regularly as new federal requirements are dispersed and the OEAA interprets them. Taking an opportunity to have all the staff in a district hear the latest information at the same time can be an efficient way to determine what further information and questions might need to be gathered and answered to effectively make assessment decisions at IEP Team meetings throughout the year.

## Guiding Questions

The following list of questions may be helpful in planning and facilitating a PD session on the assessment of students with disabilities. It is recommended that the facilitator ask staff to submit answers to these or similar questions in advance of the actual PD meeting in order to allow sufficient time to further refine answers and gather helpful materials.

1. How many students in our district take one of the MI-Access assessments, and in which assessments do they participate?

2. At IEP Team meetings, what questions arise most often regarding assessment options?
3. What materials or rubric does our district currently use to determine the appropriate state assessment for a student?
4. How have we applied the data from reports about the performance of our students with disabilities?
5. Can we answer the questions of parents or other community members about how MI-Access results should be interpreted or are used for NCLB calculations?
6. Who from our staff can or should attend one of the fall OEAA conferences (day 2 is focused on assessment for students with disabilities), and what presentations will help answer our questions?

After gaining answers to these questions—or finding that they lead to more specific queries—there are a number of places to go for more in-depth information, including (1) three key Web sites, (2) the MI-Access Toll-free Hotline (1-888-382-4246, and (3) the MI-Access e-mail address ([mi-access@tasa.com](mailto:mi-access@tasa.com)), all of which are specifically designed as hubs to help districts and their coordinators gain access to needed informa-

tion. Any questions that cannot be answered by perusing the Web sites should be directed to the hotline or the e-mail address.

## Web Resources

At [www.mi.gov/mi-access](http://www.mi.gov/mi-access), the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) Web site has dedicated several pages specifically to MI-Access. Among other things, these pages contain relevant information on the fall assessment windows, dates and locations of the OEAA fall conferences, presentations from previous year's conferences, and the IEP Team state assessment decision-making flow chart. Through this link PD teams can also become involved with the MI-Access development process by nominating colleagues to participate in numerous activities, from advising the OEAA staff on the content of its assessments to assisting in the development of plans for the future of alternate assessment in Michigan.

Another key online resource visited by many MI-Access coordinators, parents, and teachers is the MI-Access Information Center located at [www.mi-access.info](http://www.mi-access.info). This site contains a wealth of information that could be used to develop a PD module. In the "Training Materials" section, educators can learn

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# MEAP and MI-Access 2005/2006 Assessment Windows

For the first time since the 1990s, the MEAP and MI-Access assessments for grades 3-8 (and grade 9 for the MEAP only) will be administered in the fall. (See Table 1 for the content areas

assessed at each grade.) Another change: MI-Access will begin administering its grade 11 assessments in a separate cycle in the spring. To help facilitate planning and decision-mak-

ing, we have prepared Table 2, which lists all of the MEAP and MI-Access assessment dates for the 2005/2006 school year.

**TABLE 1: Grades and Content Areas Assessed at the State Level**

Content Areas	Grades							
	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	11th
English Language Arts	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
Mathematics	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
Science			X			X		X
Social Studies				X			X	X

**TABLE 2: MEAP and MI-Access assessment dates for the 2005/2006 school year**

Season/Grades	MEAP	MI-Access
Fall Grades 3-8 (and grade 9 MEAP only)	October 3 – October 21	September 28 – November 8
Fall High School Retest	October 24 – November 4	Not applicable
Spring High School <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cycle 1</li> <li>• Cycle 2</li> <li>• Cycle 3</li> </ul>	March 20 – March 31 March 27 – April 7 April 3 – April 14	February 27 – April 14 (Grade 11)

## Using *The Assist* in Special Education Team Professional Development

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how to conduct an observation for the Participation and Supported Independence assessments, and learn more about the types of items that might be found on the Functional Independence assessments. District and state results, press releases, and answers to frequently asked questions are also available. In addition, every past issue of *The Assist* can be viewed online and mined for valuable information regarding the purpose of alternate assessment and how MI-Access meets federal and state requirements. Because *The Assist*

is now available only in electronic format, this feature of the Web site is even more valuable.

Prior issues of *The Assist*, however, are valuable for more than just gaining a historical perspective of the evolution of alternate assessment in Michigan. They also can be used to flesh out district policy statements to the community at large or parents, raise and answer pertinent issues across disciplines and grade levels, and/or introduce new staff to MI-Access and its processes. As coordina-

tors prepare for another year of tough questions and important decisions, using *The Assist* and other online resources can be an excellent way of staying on the same page within a district and across the state.

Another Web resource is the Office of Educational Assessment and Accountability's Web page at [www.mi.gov/oega](http://www.mi.gov/oega). This site provides access to information related to the MEAP, MI-Access, and Accountability and Accreditation.

# GLOSSARY



**Assessment Accommodation:** An adjustment or adaptation in an assessment procedure, which is intended to minimize the impact of a student's disability on his/her performance on the assessment. Decisions regarding accommodations should be made on an individual, case-by-case basis, and should be based on the relative appropriateness to a disability and the impact the disability has on the student. The IEP Team, well in advance of the actual assessment, should make decisions about accommodations.

**Assessment Item:** A statement, question, exercise, or task in an assessment for which the test taker is to select or construct a response or perform a task. (*Standards for Educational & Psychological Testing, 1999.*)

**Assessment Plan:** Much like a builder's blueprint, an assessment plan guides how an assessment is built or developed. It includes detailed information on (1) the assumptions underlying the assessment; (2) the populations and subject areas assessed; (3) the number of assessment items and their formats; (4) prototype items to guide item writers; and (5) other information clarifying how and why the assessment should be developed.

**Pre-ID Process:** The process used to gather students' identifying information and embed it in barcodes and/or preprint it on student scan documents. The Pre-ID process, among other things, is intended to reduce the amount of time assessment administrators must spend bubbling in student information on assessment scan documents.

# The Assist™

## Important MI-Access Dates

**Live MI-Access Teleconference**  
September 14, 2005

**MI-Access Fall 2005 Assessment Window**  
**Grades 3-8**  
September 28, 2005 – November 8, 2005

**MI-Access Spring 2006 Assessment Window**  
**Grade 11**  
February 27, 2006 – April 14, 2006

## Bookmark these Web Sites:

[www.mi.gov/mi-access](http://www.mi.gov/mi-access)

[www.mi-access.info](http://www.mi-access.info)

[www.mi.gov/oeaa](http://www.mi.gov/oeaa)

[www.mi.gov/meap](http://www.mi.gov/meap)



IDEAS



TIPS  
SUGGESTIONS

If you have ideas, suggestions, or tips you would like to see included in *The Assist*, send them to [mi-access@tasa.com](mailto:mi-access@tasa.com).

This newsletter related to the assessment of students with disabilities is distributed to local and intermediate superintendents, directors of special education, MI-Access Coordinators, MEAP Coordinators, SEAC, Special Education monitors, MDE staff, school principals, Parent Advisory Committees, and institutes of higher education. *The Assist* may also be downloaded from the MI-Access Web page at [www.mi.gov/mi-access](http://www.mi.gov/mi-access).